



YOKOSUKA, Japan (May 31, 2014) Capt. Mil Yi, Navy Region Japan Chaplain, baptizes the son of Lt. Cmdr. Maryann Stampfli and Lt. Nick Stampfli aboard USS Stethem (DDG 63). Conducting baptisms aboard Navy ships is a tradition that dates back several hundred years to its origins in the British Royal Navy, where baptisms were carried out in foreign ports or for infants born at sea. (U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Rebecca Speer/Released)

CALLED TO SERVE

Since November 28, 1775, the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps has been inspiring hope, strengthening spiritual well-being, building resilience, enhancing readiness, and providing solace for service members around the globe, in times of war and in peace.

At Navy Medicine West (NMW), regional headquarters for all Navy Medicine health care and dental treatment facilities along the West Coast and Pacific Rim as well as all research and development laboratories around the globe, the regional chaplain serves to support the command's mission and people.

Capt. Mil Yi, a native of Monterey, California, assumed the dual role of NMW regional chaplain and department head of pastoral care at Naval Medical Center San Diego in July. He brings a wealth of experience to NMW from his prior duty stations that include his most recent assignment to U.S. Strategic Command and previous tours as command chaplain aboard several ships and alongside Marines.

"My role as the regional chaplain is to advise the commander on matters of morale, morals, spiritual well-being, ethics, the free exercise of religion, and all religious ministry requirements," said Yi. "Additionally, I provide professional supervision of the Religious Ministry Team (RMT) to subordinate activities as well as

train the team, advise on manpower and religious facility requirements, and coordinate religious ministry activities.”

Taking care of his team is a priority for Yi. He does this through mentoring—by providing members of his RMT with spiritual direction and career guidance. His commitment to his team and his calling imbues his philosophy of leadership.

“Leadership is about creating an environment that brings out the best in people, accomplishing goals, and making each individual, the team, and the mission successful,” said Yi.

In addition to providing leadership for the RMT, Yi is also responsible for ensuring the team meets the religious and pastoral care needs of personnel throughout the region.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Mil Yi

“Chaplains are committed to caring for all Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and their families with dignity, respect and compassion, regardless of an individual’s beliefs and religious or personal convictions,” said Yi. “My philosophy in providing spiritual support is that I will care for all.”

According to Yi, chaplains are a source of comfort and inspiration for military personnel and their families because they not only serve the people of their commands by providing spiritual support, they serve in uniform as well. Navy chaplains are embedded in operational units at sea and ashore, and have literally walked in the combat boots of those they serve.

Since their genesis, Navy chaplains have gone into harm’s way, shared the same hardships and austere conditions, alongside the Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Merchant Marines with whom they’ve served for over 200 years.

“As a Navy chaplain, I understand and have experienced the challenges that service members encounter throughout their military careers, thus I am a valuable resource for support,” said Yi.

The support provided by Navy chaplains builds resilience and increases readiness by inspiring hope and strengthening spiritual well-being, according to Yi. Chaplains do this by delivering and coordinating effective religious ministry programs and deckplate ministry—visiting service members in their space.

Chaplains also offer confidential counseling to those they serve who may be experiencing personal difficulties or facing the challenges inherent to military life. Through counseling, chaplains can offer service members coping strategies, help them build spiritual resilience, and enable them to grow in their faith so they can weather personal or professional hardships.

“There is a sacred trust rooted in the relationship between an individual and a chaplain,” said Yi.

“Chaplains are bound by complete, 100 percent confidentiality. What you say to a chaplain in confidence stays between you and the chaplain, unless you decide differently. You hold the key to who hears your story. We are here for you and we care.”

Fascinating Facts about Navy Chaplains:

- The first chaplain known to have received a commission in the U. S. Navy was William Balch in 1798.
- Navy chaplains don’t just provide spiritual support for Sailors—they also serve Marines, the Coast Guard, and Merchant Marines.
- Navy chaplains come from a variety of religious backgrounds; chaplains are often Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist.
- The first chaplain to serve exclusively with the Marine Corps was Chaplain J.F. Flemming in 1912.
- The first chaplain to serve with an operational Coast Guard unit was Chaplain Harlon Miller in 1943.
- Wages On Nov. 15, 1776—Congress fixed the base pay of a chaplain at \$20 a month, which translates to about \$515 today.
- As non-combatants, chaplains do not have the right to participate in hostilities and are prohibited from carrying weapons. Enlisted Sailors in the religious programs specialist (RP) rating often serve as armed protection for chaplains in combat and operational environments.
- The first mention of the church pennant in the Signal Book was made in 1858 and the first directions for display were in the 1967 edition of the Signal Book. On June 3, 1942 Congress authorized the church pennant as the only flag that can be flown over the American flag, which can occur only at sea during religious services conducted by a Navy chaplain.

- At the outset of WWII, Dec. 7, 1941, there were 105 chaplains on active duty. Before the war's end, over 2,800 men had worn the uniform of the Navy chaplain.
- Two Navy chaplains have received the Medal of Honor for their acts of heroism and bravery—Lt. Vincent R. Capodanno, a Staten Island, New York, native, and Capt. Joseph T. O'Callahan, a Boston native. Capodanno died tending to injured Marines during the Vietnam War. When enemies bombed USS Franklin during WWII, O'Callahan, though injured, provided comfort to gravely injured Sailors of all faiths before gathering men to cool weapons magazines, preventing more damage to the ship.